

Diving Deep Into The History of The Tetrpharmakon / Tetrpharmakos

Post by “Don” of December 8, 2024 at 7:57 AM

According to the PhD dissertation linked below, it appears *tetrpharmakos* was a general idea among philosophers and physicians in the ancient world. The Epicurean one was likely a response to this.

[Theory and Terminology of Mixture in Galen.](#)

[The concepts of *krasis* and *mixis* in Galen’s thought: PhD Dissertation, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin von MA Claudia Mirrione](#)

For Hippocrates showed that what constitutes the nature of man is not one thing but many, not that none of the four exists in the body in its pure state. For the leading proponents of this doctrine do not say that this is the principle. Rather they hold that there is one thing over and above the four, and which is constituted from them, just as the power of the *tetrpharmakon* is neither wax, pitch, resin, nor fat, but something else over and above them, which is generated from the mixture of all of them, although this latter doctrine comes in two forms. For some people say that only the four qualities are mixed through-and-through with one another, while others hold that also the substances themselves are (the Peripatetics favour the former doctrine, the Stoics the latter). (Trans. Hankinson; slightly modified)

T2 Galen in Hipp. Nat. Hom. comment. K. XV 32.1-11 Mewaldt 18.27-19.7

In fact, the four line verse found in Philodemus is not even brought up! This dissertation sheds a whole new light on how tetrapharmakos was understood in the ancient world. I wouldn't necessarily recommend reading the entire paper, but do a few searches for Epicurus or the word tetrapharmakos and skim the quotes. An unexpected find.

PS. It appears Dr. Mirrione got her PhD: <https://www.klassphil.hu-berlin.de/en/avh-profess...-staff/mirrione>